Hey,

So, you're going to BYU. You're probably coming off a mission, going on a mission, or wish everybody would stop asking about missions. Maybe you've done some visits to campus, maybe friends or relatives live in Utah, maybe you grew up in Provo. Probably you have a certain vision of how things are gonna go. It's also likely that there's a little bit of fear or trepidation or something balled up in the excitement of a brand new life stage. I'm gonna try to give you some pointers. As far as qualifications, I just graduated in April 2025, I was a resident assistant in the Helaman dorms for a while, and I've had roommates from ages 19 to 26. So, no, maybe I'm not Chase Roberts or a Romney or whatever, but I've seen a lot of people go through the Y. Take some free advice from me, or don't, I'm not getting paid for this. For ease of reference, I'll split this into the Luke 2:52 categories: Physical, Spiritual, Mental/Intellectual, and Social. There will almost certainly be cross contamination between the headings. It's fine, don't worry about it.

Physical

Your body is mainly important because it houses *you*. It's how you interact with the physical world. Also important is how your physical health will impact you mentally, academically, spiritually, even socially. Notice I say "health"--it's intentional. How you look is honestly kind of irrelevant. Keep in mind that you look like a conglomeration of your ancestors, all of whom eventually had kids not because of how they necessarily looked, but because of other factors. I digress, but we'll at least briefly return to that later.

As a general rule of thumb, you should do at least one of the following every semester: get a gym membership (I have a soft spot for the VASA locations, and the campus gym is free), join an intramural sports team where you can fling frisbees or something with your buddies,

and/or take a Student Wellness (SWELL) class. Now, don't hate yourself if you don't do one of those, or if you don't take full advantage. What's important is to get your body moving. SWELL classes range from Meditation and Yoga to Volleyball and Skiing, and you can retake them. Just carving out some time, even a couple times a week, to stretch, elevate your heart rate, and (most importantly) clearing your mind will do wonders. And if you mess up or aren't consistent, that's fine, you're human. Another class that you should do for exercise (and maybe dating or meeting people) is Social Dance; it's one of the most popular classes on campus for a reason. Skills like timing, footwork, and following subtle signals are really useful in everyday life. Also, hygiene! Shower at least once a day, brush your teeth, wear deodorant–your friends, roommates,and general mental, physical, and social health will thank you.

What you put into your body is also important. This was and is my biggest personal struggle, given that my entire time at BYU I lived within walking distance of a food truck, Little Caesar's, Don Chuy's, Taco Bell, the Wilk, or the Cannon Center. Listen, if you wanna do fast food or pre-made offerings, go for it. You can live pretty easily off of campus food. Cooking is fun and good, and you should do it. If you don't cook, at least eat one fruit or vegetable a day. Protein is good. You'll have a lot of options for sugar and caffeine, and no matter how much of that you consume you need to drink more water. Water is very important. If you don't eat anything green or drink water, you will either die or be depressed or both. Also, you should sleep–and not in class, not fake sleep. Sleep at the right levels will be so important for your brain functioning.

You don't have to be jacked, or shredded, or hot, or even fit. But just try to make sure your body stays at least marginally happy. The body is one half of your soul, according to the

Doctrine and Covenants, and you will be much happier, more academically successful, and more spiritually connected if you spend at least a little time taking care of the body.

Spiritual

One of the biggest benefits to going to BYU, in my opinion, is that nearly every class engages with morality, if not religion and the institutional Church. Sometimes this is because of prayers offered in a poli sci class or discussing divine identity in a creative writing class or testimony meeting in an Arabic course or devotionals in Astronomy, or maybe it comes up during lecture or office hours. There are also the YSA wards surrounding campus, the weekly campus devotionals and forums, and, of course, your religion classes. The devotionals are worth your time, at least once a semester I'd say–I mostly avoided them for most of my first couple years, but my last year on campus I didn't miss a single one. Often they are hit or miss, but going with a friend or even just taking the time to think or write notes about how you could apply the ideas are great. Devotionals, and actually especially forums with nonmember guests, made me ponder and change a lot. Similarly, every Provo YSA ward has ward prayer–try to make it to that every week, especially if you missed sacrament or whatever. It's a chance to have a quick spiritual thought, get to know people, and have a pretty informal prayer meeting. Again, I avoided these early in my time at BYU but by the end I found them so incredibly useful for touching the divine.

As far as religion classes go, you should definitely try to do a little bit more than the required credits. Personally, my religion credits could easily have been a double major when you look at the tally. In particular, you should try to find more off-the-beaten-path things. If you're more intellectually inclined with your testimony, or want to be, try Isaiah, Book of Mormon as Sacred Literature, or a Special Topics class. If you want to get to know how other people deal

with the Holy and the Numinous, take classes like World Religions, Survey of Judaism and Islam, Survey of Eastern Religions, or something on Church History or the different types of Christianity. If you just wanna drill deeper on your faith and your understanding of the gospel, try Living Prophets, Seminary Teaching, or (if you're pre-mish) Mission Prep. In terms of specific professors, I adored Joseph Spencer, John Hilton, Eric Huntsman, Derek Sainsbury, Krystal VL Pearce, and Greg Wilkinson (who is maybe a little irreverent, but honestly made my testimony grow so much more than more "standard" teachers) and many others. There are lots of other great ones, and I won't tell you the ones I hated because everyone has different ones of those. But take advantage of where you are. Also, each year BYU hosts a Passover seder and a Ramadan Iftar–both are dinners where you get to understand a different culture and religion. Try to go to one of those at least once.

As far as wards and bishops go, they can be a bit of a lottery. I enjoyed most of mine. Generally, the more you engage with the ward, the better relationships you'll have with people. For example, I made a point to try to get up early and greet others for sacrament at least near the beginning of the semester, if not throughout the time I was in the ward. Try to make at least one friend on the ward council, and at least one friend each in Elders Quorum and Relief Society. Those friendships will yield gospel discussions, help make church feel more welcoming and doable, and anchor you in a community. Now, again, that's not a hard and fast rule, but it's one that made things easier. Also, there are a bunch of random devotionals all the time on campus (I'm not sure if this is still a thing, but the Wonder of Scripture series was so good). If you don't go to the Tuesday ones, try to catch at least a couple of the random talks.

On a less institutional, more personal level, try to pray at least once or twice a day. I only had one roommate who I saw pray every day, and when I followed his example I felt much better

and more connected with God. Scriptures are also really important–and I'd include the Handbook, manuals, and conference talks in there. Most importantly, going to the temple at least once about a semester helps ground you, if not more frequently. Combined with the physical work, these spiritual foundations will set you up really well for success at BYU.

Mental/Intellectual

I know I've been yapping a lot. We're about halfway through. Remember, this advice is not a prescription, but it is based on a lot of personal trial and error. Ready?

Go to class. It's really easy to skip classes, but skipping rarely if ever actually helps your mental health. Also, office hours. Don't necessarily haunt your professors, but get to know them and try to get at least one faculty mentor in your department (more is always good too!) and maybe also one mentor in the religion department (I've even seen "celebrity professors" like Brad Wilcox walking and talking with students after class, and even more so the ones I mentioned above). I'd also suggest taking a couple electives outside your major or minor, and being creative about your generals. Physical Science is good if you want to just get all the STEM stuff at once, for example, but Dinosaurs and Descriptive Astronomy (among others) are fun and can be sprinkled in throughout your time. It would be worth it to take a creative writing class, a class on myths or humanities (Greek and Roman Lit and Islamic Humanities are my biggest recs there), a music class (more fun than you might expect). Also, take advantage of the wild classes at BYU. For example, while I served stateside English I took classes on French, Arabic, and Farsi–I'm not very strong in those, but I know more than the average American now. If you can make it work financially, try to pull off a study abroad–you get practical knowledge, wild stories, close professor relationships, and new friends. Be willing to do things–several of my friends and I got published academically or professionally while we were students, as well as presented at

symposia, attended conferences, conducted research. Heck, a guy in my ward started a boutique clothing brand and is actually doing well off of it, not to mention the number of small bands I've seen formed. Debate teams, chess, trying to pick up some mechanical skills, all will serve you well beyond their context and your university days. Experience is the teacher of all things, said Julius Caesar, and you will be happier and a more valuable worker if you have skills outside of your official "domain." You don't actually need to be a brainiac to do a lot of these, and it looks like gold on your resume. Also, worry about your major but not that much. You can do almost anything with almost any major, especially if you get good jobs (discussed more under "Social") or random qualifications. Really, the only majors that should sweat are the engineers, because doctors and lawyers and all of them at least have grad school before they could ruin a bridge or a power plant, and even engineers can do interesting and exciting things. Keep your brain active, and it will serve you so well.

As far as mental health, it's safe to say you'll have at least one crisis during school, even if just a minor one. This could be related to dating (especially the lack thereof), academics, personal stuff, medical issues, or something else entirely. Keep in touch with your professors if you're struggling—nine times out of ten they'll bend over backwards to help, and the other time they'll at least give you some perspective. Bishops and friends are also super useful when you're in crisis. A good percentage of my friends, especially those you wouldn't expect, have gone to the on-campus counseling clinic (basement of the Wilk) and the therapists there are great and care about you. If you're in the dorms, talk to your RA; they have some basic mental health training and will keep an eye out for you. Also, try to set aside a couple minutes a day to meditate, pray, think, be still, breathe deeply. Working out also helps more than you'd maybe expect; sometimes so does doing some homework to get your mind off of things.

Also, as far as choosing a major and a career path, schedule an appointment with the Career Center like right away. They'll help you take some tests to better understand your strengths and interests and what that translates to as far as jobs and schoolwork. I also once got the advice that you should look for something that you're good at, that you enjoy, that you can make money in, and that you can acquire skills in. No matter what, you will be okay.

Fundamentally, stretch intellectually and give your mind a chance to grow and focus. A balanced and inquisitive mind will build on your spiritual and physical health and help you become a better and more successful person. You'll also be better prepared for social life as a BYU student.

Social

For social, we're going to have three rough parts. First and foremost are roommates. You will most likely need to live with someone and won't have mom or a mission president to appeal to. Second, dating. It can be good. It can suck. You'll be okay. Third, one of the most underrated parts of college is networking. The better your network and the stronger your relationships, the more likely you are to succeed and be happy.

Roommate issues will invariably show up—again, in the dorms, your RA has some conflict deescalation training, so talk to them. If you're off campus, there are three basic rules. The first one is that you should do your best to interpret everything someone else does through a charitable lens, especially if you live with them—odds are, the dirty dishes, missing soda, or bombed out toilet are not specifically targeted at you and aren't openly hostile actions. Second rule is communication—no silent treatments. Talk things through. Also, don't only talk to your roommates when there's an issue; issues are more likely to be resolved when the person knows you care. Third rule, and maybe most importantly, is that you are in charge of you and they are in

charge of them. Live and let be, and do your best not to let it get to you. If you want more elaboration on that, there are good resources on the BYU website and online for handling conflicts—I would highly recommend the book "Crucial Conversations," as well as maybe "How to Win Friends and Influence People."

Dating is not actually the most important thing at BYU. Gun to my head, only about 20-40% of my friends who graduated with me were married. If you don't end up married, that's okay. Make married friends though, because they will feed you and they usually actually eat vegetables. Don't let your romantic or sexual desires turbonuke your chances at connection with someone, and be extremely suspicious of online only stuff—chastity issues aside, there are scammers and sextortionists out there who would love to bankrupt you because of a mistake you made at a weak moment. A small but noticeable amount of my male friends especially got hit by that to some degree. Also, be confident and courteous. People you date will talk about you, and you may or may not have your friends give you referrals or set you up. Be kind and friendly and don't too pushy—read the situation and follow the Spirit. If you don't end up married when you graduate BYU, it's not because you're any more ugly or defective than someone who got married six weeks into showing up; similarly if you do end up getting married, take full advantage of that and be willing and ready to support your single friends. John 3:8 says that "the wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh or whither it goeth." The same goes with social life in general and especially in dating—there are divorces, broken engagements, stillborn situationships, and happy baby laden families that show up, and it's just part of life. Sure there are best practices but they're the same things you've heard about forever and at root very similar to making friends.

Incidentally, try to have a solid friendship with at least one person of the opposite sex. They make life so much better, regardless as to dating or not dating. It's also a great way to build your network. Networking is essentially the art of making friends and acquaintances with broad and interesting backgrounds or experiences who may or may not be helpful professionally or socially later. Sometimes a professor will host a dinner at their house, or there will be an etiquette dinner or alumni meeting on campus, or you'll run into an apostle or ambassador or author on campus (I have had all of those happen). Try not to be off putting and shoot your shot and see if you can get advice, a handshake, or even build a small acquaintanceship. Sometimes it grows from there, and if it doesn't you at least said hi, and in some of those cases you got dinner. Don't hesitate to ask questions when they're asked for in these meetings or in your classes; intelligent and (importantly) concise questions and comments will build your reputation faster than almost anything other than measurable and tangible successes. Your peers are also important. Try to join at least one club or off campus group—there's one for literally almost everything—and build your reputation and relationships. I don't care if it's DnD or video games or writing or BYUSA or the finance club, get out of your apartment and meet people. Clubs and mentors and friendships are the things that make the university work and that you can leverage for your future. Yeah grades are important, and so is everything else, but a robust professional network is so useful. Try to get an on campus job, and especially look for internships or off campus opportunities. You will be amazed at the variety of options, and if you don't see something you like then try to start your own. There are a lot of paths to success. The library, dining services, dorms, Washington Seminar, research jobs—the things that give you money, skills, and people that you can synergize with are innumerable. No matter what your life trajectory is, have at least a couple connections you can leverage in a time of need.

Your social life is not the end-all-be-all of college, but frankly neither are your physical health, academics, mental health, career, or spirituality. Success at BYU comes from trying to do okay in every aspect of your life, and ideally excelling in one or more of these very broad quadrants.

Conclusion

Anyway, I hope that this was helpful. College in general is a beast, but it's not a tiger or bear that wants to eat you. It's more like an ox or drafthorse that you use for success and that if you lose control can sweep you away. As a freshman in 2025, you have the blessing of a class called Univ 101 where you will have a professor and peer mentor who are there only to help you succeed. Other students or alumni can give you more tailored advice, like your exact schedule or who to date or the best study locations (my two favorites were the booths in the Wilk and the library's fifth floor Ancient Studies Collection, by the sarcophagus). These broad and general principles are based on how I found a place at BYU and success.

You're gonna do great. I have faith in you.

Enter to learn, go forth to serve

-A New Alumnus